



OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY

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Clerk Dorothy Brown Makes Creative Recommendation for New Funding Source for Cook County Budget

Mirroring the challenge of achieving a balanced budget faced by other governmental entities throughout the nation, the Honorable Dorothy Brown, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, today presented the FY 2005 budget request for the Clerk's Office to the Cook County Board of Commissioners. Recognizing the County Board's need for additional revenue balanced with the need for an efficiently run court system Clerk Brown recommended a creative measure that could generate more revenue for Cook County in the future. Clerk Brown also called for the County Board to create a Cook County Budget Review Citizens Commission to independently study the County budget in order to make both cost cutting and revenue generating recommendations. In addition, Clerk Brown recommended additional areas of consideration for increasing revenue.

Clerk Brown's creative recommendation for a new funding source is that the County research the legality of creating a 501 (c) (3) organization, similar to those created by the Chicago Public Schools that fund the educational training of its teachers, to fund educational training for County employees, and possibly the charitable community outreach portions of the County's budget.

"A 501 (c) (3) organization is for both educational and charitable purposes and creating one would permit the County to petition corporate and individual donors who would then receive tax deduction benefits," said Clerk Brown. "Implementing this process could result in the raising of vast amounts of funds for training a quality workforce for Cook County."

The Cook County Budget Review Citizens Commission that Clerk Brown is recommending is similar to a Commission or Taskforce created by Maricopa County in Arizona.

"I learned about Maricopa County's Citizens Commission while attending a conference there and touring their Circuit Court Clerk's Office to understand their E-filing system," said Clerk Brown.

Clerk Brown learned that once the Maricopa County Citizens Commission analyzed the County's budget and recognized the need for new funding, it recommended that a referendum be voted on by the citizens of that County to increase certain taxes.

Because of the independent perspective of the Citizens Commission in analyzing the needs of the Maricopa County government, the citizens of that County trusted in the recommendations of the Commission and passed the referendum. As a result they have been able to fund all of their court technology initiatives, E-Filing as well as integrated justice and other County Budget areas.

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In addition, Clerk Brown recommended that the County Board go to Springfield and seek an increase in both the Court Automation and Document Storage Fees. Both of these fees are only \$5 per filing and have not been increased since 1989 and 1993 respectively.

According to Clerk Brown, “The increase in the cost to store documents and the rapid changes in technology for both document storage and court automation screams out for an increase in both of these fees.”

Clerk Brown also recommended a change in the approach for handling deferred fees.

“I fully support President Stroger and the Board of Commissioners’ commitment to contain the budgetary obligations of Cook County. This was evident by my staff’s 100% participation in the one (1) day furlough program in 2004,” said Clerk Brown. “However, much remains to be done to fully realize the strategic benefits planned for the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, to meet the needs of the citizens of Cook County, the Cook County Board, the Office of the Chief Judge and the public safety agencies for which various services are provided.”

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